ANIMATION:
a creative challenge

John & Faith Hubley

JOHN AND FAITH HUBLEY

FOREWORD

Following graduation from the Art Center School of Los Angeles, John Hubley worked for Walt Disney Studios on *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, Pinnochio,* the "Rite of Spring" sequence in *Fantasia, Dumbo* and *Bambi.* Later he joined United Productions of America (UPA), was one of the co-creators of *Mr. Magoo,* and directorially supervised the animation of *Gerald McBoing Boing.*

When John and Faith Hubley formed their own company in 1955, her motion picture experience in editing and production complemented his knowledge of animation. Their first film together, *Adventures of An**, won eleven awards. Subsequently, they have received more than forty awards and citations including three Academy Award Oscars.

John and Faith Hubley were interviewed informally at their studio in New York City on September 24 and 25, 1973.

CREDITS

Interview: John D. Ford, Director, Mid-America Film Center, Kansas City Art Institute

Transcription: Nancy J. Lottes

Design: Jay Wesselink

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Q. (John Ford) How early did you get interested in art? At what age?

A. (John Hubley) About 3 or 4. I had a grandfather who was a painter. He was born in England and was taught in Switzerland. He came over here, to Michigan, as a young man, and he painted all his life. My mother went to the Art Institute in Chicago, and we had a lot of painting around our house. I used to watch my grandfather when I was a little kid; so I have that kind of studio background. It was always ordained that I would go to art school as soon as I got out of high school. I went a couple of years to college in Los Angeles and then I went to the Art Center and studied painting. After three years of this I went to Disney; that's how I got into animation--out of a painting, design and drawing interest.

Q. How old were you when you started at Disney?

A. I was exactly 22.

Q. What did your apprenticeship work on *Snow White* entail?

A. Making background tracings and painting backgrounds and layouts for animators.

Q. Was the Disney operation an assembly line set up?

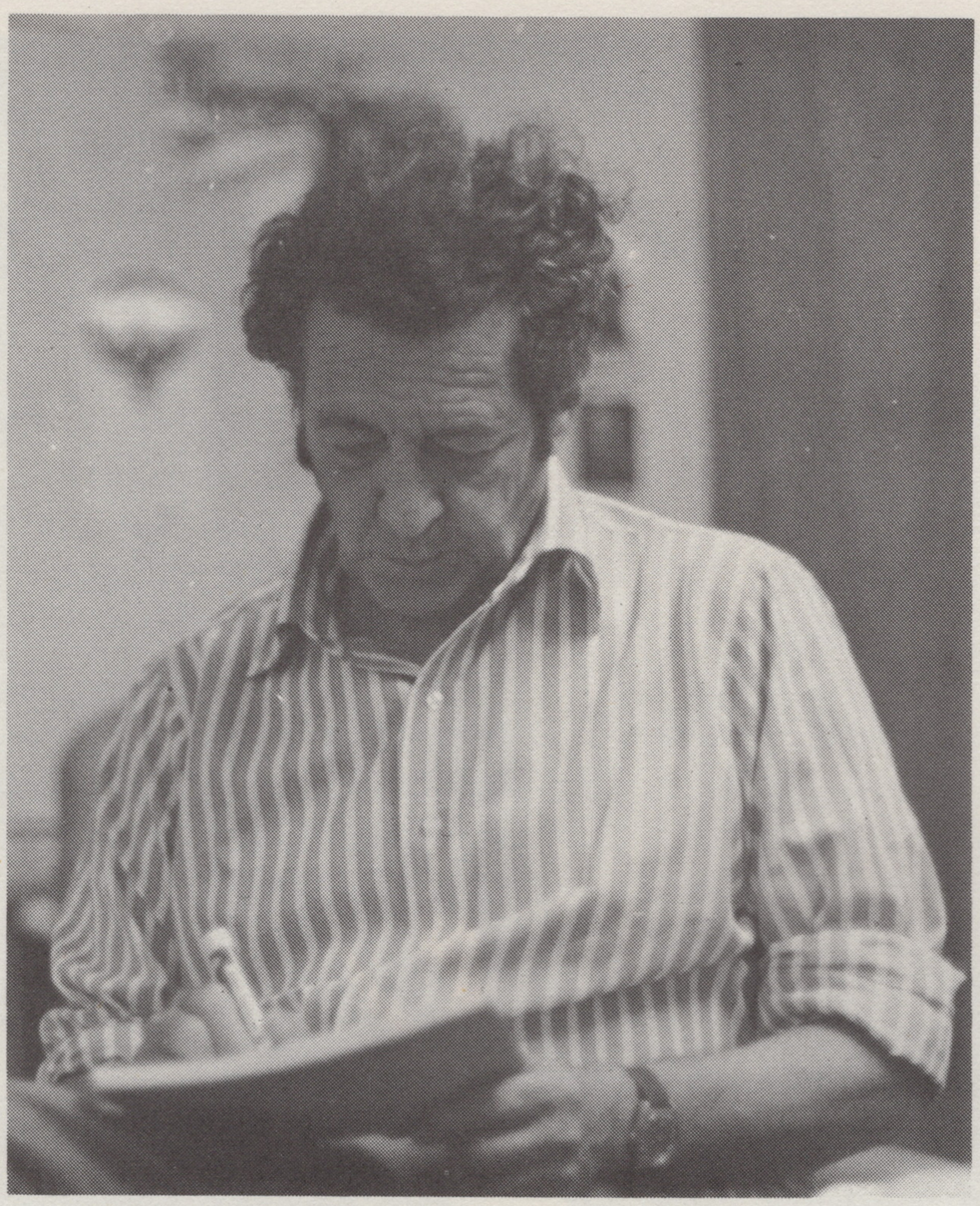
A. It was like a marvelous big Renaissance Craft Hall in that it had a terrific teaching program and a lot of training that went with it. Young people coming in got a terrific break, I believe, because they were given a chance to study drawing, composition, animation, action. We studied old movies, layout, art direction. All of us were encouraged to study these free courses. Out of that came advancements, too. They were very anxious to find the exceptional people and move them up fast, because they were going through such a rapid expansion. When I got there, *Snow White* had just gotten underway. I started working on shorts, but it wasn't long before I got onto *Snow White*. It came out in 1937; then we went right into *Pinnochio, Fantasia, Bambi* and *Dumbo.*

Q. Were your responsibilities for these other films the same as for *Snow White*?

A. No, I was moved up. On *Pinnochio* I went from Assistant Art Director to full Art Director: that is, full layout man. You worked directly with the animation director on scene breakdowns. I did that also on *Fantasia, Bambi* and *Dumbo.*

Q. Was the "Rites of Spring" sequence your work in *Fantasia*?

A. No, just the beginning of it. The "Rites of Spring" sequence was broken up between two or three unit directors supervised by one over-all director. One director did the dinosaur fight; another director had from the beginning--coming out of the galaxy into the molten stage of the planet and the cooling off into the greenery. That's the sequence I worked on. I also did some work on a later sequence when there was a drought. It was not scientifically accurate in terms of the demise of the reptiles. It was more likely they were frozen by the ice age. But Disney didn't want an ice age; he wanted a desert sequence. I also did some background painting on "Sorcerer's Apprentice." Working on *Fantasia* was a great experience.



Q. What happened after you left Disney?

A. There was a year of working for Screen Gems/ Columbia. Columbia had just hired Frank Tashlin, who replaced a man named Mintz. Remember Tashlin? He did a lot of Jerry Lewis films later in his career. Tash was a Disney story man, and when the Disney strike broke, he took on the job of refurbishing Screen Gems; so he hired a lot of Disney people. Under Tashlin we tried some very experimental things; none of them quite got off the ground, but there was a lot of ground broken. We were doing crazy things that were anti the classic Disney approach. That was in 1942. Tashlin was replaced by Dave Fleischer--the Out of the Inkwell, Popeye director. I left and went into the Air Force when an Air Force motion picture unit was formed. About fifty of us formed the animation branch. Frank Thomas was the unit director I worked with. He's still at Disney; one of the grand old men of animation. A nice guy. We worked on training films for three years. We also did a lot of experimental things like flat area painting techniques and photo-collage. We had done about four films on aerial gunnery. We had developed a character called Trigger Joe, and Mel Blanc did the voice. It was a marvelous character that the gunners could identify with. We had a lot of fun with the obstinate side of this character, and he turned out to be a very good device for teaching. He kept progressing and growing as weapons developed. First it was a question of just how you aim a free wheeling 50 caliber gun. Then came an automatic sight that you put on the gun which took care of all the calculations. The only thing you had to do was set it right. So we had to do a film on that with Trigger Joe using the new gunsight. When there was an improvement on <u>that</u> sight, we had to do another film. Then an automatic system came in, in which all the guns on the ship were run by a computer-automation firing system. The gunners didn't do anything but flip a couple of switches, and all the guns were automatically trained. By this time, Frank was discharged (honorably) and I got a chance to direct. This film put Joe in the B-29s. We had to unteach all the things we had taught him before, and ask him to trust the system. The day this film was finished was the day the war was over, literally. That's when I went to UPA. I had been doing some work on the side--what is now called moonlighting. It was permitted as long as it didn't interfere with army duties. I had worked on a film called *Brotherhood of Man*--an early UPA picture-- so I naturally drifted to UPA when I got out. That's when we did the Navy Flight Safety series, one of which was *Flathatting*. At UPA I became a full-fledged producer/director.

Q. What about this *Brotherhood of Man* film--this great break-through with tradition?

A. Well, you should see it. We went for very flat stylized characters, instead of the global three-dimensional Disney characters. It was greatly influenced by Saul Steinberg and that sharp-nosed character

he was doing at the time. Bob Cannon did most of the animation; in fact, he was the director. I was a co-writer on it, and did the layouts, if I recall correctly. Ring Lardner, Jr. and Phil Eastman shared writing credit. Paul Julian did all the backgrounds very flat; he used areas of color that would be elided from the line. Very advanced graphics for that period. Up until this time, the Disney tradition hadn't been broken very much, although there had been a few attempts. None of them were as "pure" as or all out as this one. It was financed by the United Auto Workers. Victor Reuther, Walter Reuther and Thomas had been having a lot of problems with racial tension during the war in the auto factories; so they embarked on a big education program on racial equality and anti-discrimination for their membership. That's why they sponsored the film. Later it went way beyond that and became widely circulated, and I think is still being circulated.

Q. So your responsibilities on it were writing?

A. I did the story boards and some of the basic layouts and stylizations, but being in the Army I didn't get involved in the full production. It came out pretty well. I've got one print of it--they're hard to find!

Q. Then, that film was a sponsored film, but it became very popular. It was run as a short in theaters, and it got an educational distribution?

A. It didn't get much of a theater distribution. It was a kind of controversial film at that time, because it dealt with racial equality at a time when there was a lot of prejudice. It was based on a pamphlet written by two anthropologists, Gene Weltfish and Ruth Benedict from Columbia University. The pamphlet itself had a heavy distribution as it was a public affairs bulletin that was sent all over to schools, libraries, and overseas. The Army bought tons of them and distributed them. At some point some Southern Congressman started to squawk about this "equality idea"; he didn't like the fact that the Army was spending money distributing this stuff. The film got involved in this a little bit too. The army bought something like 300 prints of it to distribute through the whole overseas operations. When they buy something they go all out! This Congressman threw that in the fire with all the pamphlets, when he got sore about it. So it stopped the showing of the film for a while. The order went out that they couldn't use it. Anyway the film had a very wide circulation in libraries and schools. I don't know if it was ever shown on television; that was before television was nation-wide. Then the distribution of it got a little muddy--a question of who really owned it and who had the rights to distribute it. It's still up for grabs; nobody really knows where that negative is. The auto union gave up on it, and are out of it. Brandon Films is reported to have made a lot of money on it.

Q. Did you get to see any of that money?

A. No. We didn't, UPA didn't, I don't think the Auto Workers even saw much of it. The film has had a long interesting life.

Q. Tell me about you, your own work, your own relationship to the Magoo character, Gerald McBoing Boing, and Frankie and Johnny and the *Rooty-Toot-Toot* film.

A. I was hired originally as creative head of UPA, as the layout director. For about a year after I was there, we were doing the Navy films. There was an internal fight between the owners of the company. They got into a hassle about direction and policy and they split. Stephen Bosustow went out and raised the money to buy them out. As I understand it, he felt he could raise the money provided I stayed there as head of production. His money source said you can buy it if you keep the staff. I was the staff! The other two owners were both creative filmmakers, but they were leaving. So he came to me and made me a stock deal and I stayed in. Part of the arrangement in my contract was to become head of production, to get a percentage of the stock, and to have a position on the board. That's when I really moved in to a management position in the company. The other two guys moved to New York. We kept making industrial movies. Bob Cannon was there off and on; he'd work there for awhile; then he'd go to Warner's and work some; then to Disney for awhile. Different guys were floating in and out. Then along came the Columbia pictures deal, which was the old Screen Gems, which has now folded up. They wanted some more shorts. We were able to sign a contract with them to produce six to eight shorts on a participating basis. They owned these old animal characters--the Fox and the Crow--they'd been making pictures with them for years and they wanted to keep the series going. So the first films we did we had to use the Fox and the Crow. By this time we were really feeling our oats. We had done the Navy films, *The Brotherhood of Man,* and had the impetus of a new style and a new way of thinking about characters, stories, music, art, design, everything! That interested Columbia, too. They were ready to go with something new. So the first one with the Fox and the Crow was *Robin Hood-lum*. The Fox as Robin Hood, the Crow as the Sheriff of Nottingham. The Merry Men were a sanguine bunch of tea-drinking Englishmen. It was funny and very sophisticated. Columbia didn't like it--it wasn't a standard audience film. We made another one called *The Magic Fluke,* which was a more popular story using the same characters, Fox and Crow. It was more successful. We were using very modern techniques even though we had to use the conventional characters of the Fox and the Crow. We were doing very modern backgrounds with flat patterns, opaque paint and other things that weren't particularly "classical." After *The Magic Fluke*, we kept hitting Columbia with, "We want to do original shorts and we're stuck with tired animals. Our strength and our vision is to do human characters."

We talked them into doing one, and that was our first Magoo. It was a bit of a compromise, because we had an animal in it. It was the old *Ragtime Bear*. The near-sighted old coot goes up into the mountains for a rest. He takes his nephew who was a banjo playing college kid in a fur coat. Magoo mixes him up with the bear; the bear loves that banjo, and the bear keeps trying to get at that banjo. It was a lot of fun, with the voices of Jim Backus and Terry Hausner. That was the beginning of it. From there on the pressure was on to get into a series. We started making Magoos. I made (produced-directed) about four more. By that time I was tugging against them. I was instinctively against the idea of a series. I always liked to be able to go into a brand new idea instead of having to repeat things with the same character. Also the studio kept getting bigger as it got more successful. I was really getting spread too thin and was getting no creative work done; too busy being an executive. We arrived at a joint decision of a split between Cannon and me, making two units, each independent. So for several films we did our own thing. But McBoing was one of the last ones of my supervisory period. Cannon was the actual animation director. He really did a great job on that--it was his own personal animation style--which was another reason why Cannon was moved into his own unit. The first thing I did when I got back to my own as a director, which was like getting back to the drawing board again, was *Rooty-Toot-Toot*--the Frankie and Johnny legend--the shooting of Johnny and trial of Frankie. This was pretty well made. It might be called sexist today. A guy by the name of Phil Moore did the music on it. To my knowledge he was the first black composer to work directly on a theatrical cartoon and to get a screen credit for his work. That was in '50 or '51. And then I did a few more Magoos. When a job called *The Four Poster* came in, which was to do a series of interscenes in the Stanley Kramer movie with Rex Harrison and Lilli Palmer. That was rather historically interesting--a way of mixing animation with live action.

Q. Who designed Magoo?

A. I did the design and another fellow and myself were writers on the first one. Millard Kaufman and I had the assignment to write a new story. We'd been hollering about doing an original so they finally told us, okay you can do one; so Millard and I had to sit down and figure out what the hell we were going to do. That was the story we came up with--the two of us working together. It was the story of a near-sighted guy who mistakes his nephew for a bear. Then we did the casting. An old friend of mine, Jerry Hausner, an actor we'd been using a lot, said, "There's only one guy in the whole town who can do that voice. You've got to use him! I'll get him for you and bring him out here--Jim Backus!" So out comes this crazy Backus, who was just a natural, and he fell right into the character. And the whole thing exploded. The first three or four of those were really great. Developing the character was sort of a creative surge. But it got into a very rote style after awhile. They just took very limited aspects of the character--mostly his near-sightedness--and hung onto it. A great deal in the original character, the strength of him, was the fact that he was so damn bull-headed. It wasn't just that he couldn't see very well; even if he had been able to see, he still would have made dumb mistakes, 'cause he was such a bull-headed, opinionated old guy. When they started cutting the budget, they used very simplistic animation and the gags became obvious. We used to dream up a lot of subtleties and we ad-libbed a lot of the dialogue.

Q. Then that ad lib technique for sound started a lot earlier than what your biography indicates?

A. Yes, I'd say it started with Backus in a limited way. We'd throw him a line and let him play around with it. He'd take about five times more than we'd need and then we'd go back and decide what we'd use.

Q. *Gerald McBoing Boing* got an Academy Award. Did that give UPA a lot of status all of a sudden and a lot of clients?

A. Yes, it also started a lot of internal trouble like fights for power.

Q. Tell me this, the big studios would commission an outfit like UPA or Disney to do cartoons to run along with their features. Was that the procedure rather than UPA making cartoons and trying to sell them to the studios?

A. Yes.

Q. Were cartoons always a money-losing thing?

A. Not always; they were money makers in the 30's and 40's, but by the 50's it was a dwindling thing. As the impact of television increased and attendance at theaters decreased, the use of shorts fell off; there was a point when it broke, and it just wasn't worth making them anymore. But they were useful as fillers, and for a long time, they didn't expect to make much money on them. You can bet that nobody in Hollywood ever spent a nickel on something they weren't making money on in some way!

Q. I find that artists especially are fascinated by old black and white cartoons, whatever they may be--Popeyes, Betty Boops. An enormous amount of work must have gone into making them.

A. Well, labor was at a much lower price; they could put a lot more people to work on them. They used to have much bigger staffs and did everything on twos or ones. They really worked with many drawings, compared to the modern modified styles. The simplified nature of the UPA style was due to the fact that we were working on lower budgets. We had to find ways of economizing and still get good results. So we cut down on animation and got into stylized ways of handling action. All of which became a basic pattern for the television daytime serial stuff. It was a natural development for lower budgets. There's no substitute for full animation. What the character can do if you make use of full drawings is really irreplaceable. You just can't fake it.

Q. When did you and Faith Hubley begin working together?

A. The first one was *Adventures of An *.*

Q. (Questioning Faith Hubley) We've been talking historically with John Hubley up to and including UPA. Now I want to find out what happened after. What is your background in Art and in Films and how did you and John get started together?

A. (Faith Hubley) We met in Hollywood in 1946 or 47. I was editing a film called *Human Growth* on sex education (I think it was the first) produced by Eddie Albert directed by Irving Lerner, and UPA did the animation. My background is live action. I started as a messenger at Columbia, in Hollywood, sound effects cutter, music cutter, a film editor, script supervisor (continuity) and an associate producer. I worked on *Twelve Angry Men* as script supervisor. So my background is in live action, editing and production, and I was a secret painter. I studied painting at night. When John started to work on *Finian's Rainbow*--an animated feature that never got made--I was hired as his assistant. We were married shortly after that and we continued working separately, some together. I went to the Art Student's League for four years at one point, while working here in the afternoons.

Q. Were you interested in art all the way back to age three like John?

A. Art and music.

Q. Why did you form your own company? Was that the next thing that happened?

A. There's one step in between that he really ought to tell you about because it's his life and I might not do it properly. The period preceeding our move back to New York, he had a company that made principally commercials. I have much stronger feelings than John about the risks of spending one's life in advertising. We made a compromise when we moved to New York: we would try to make one serious film a year and do whatever else we had to do to support that film. The first film that we made together was *Adventures of An *.*

Q. That is an interesting commitment--to make one "serious" film a year. No one else seems to be doing that in animation or anything else.

A. John Korty does. Just a few people. It's not a mass movement.

Q. Is it an expensive venture?

A. Yes, it is. It's been difficult--a terrific struggle--but I don't know of any other way.

Q. Do you maintain that commitment today?

A. Yes..If you're a painter, you don't pre-sell your canvasses, you just feel you have to work. Sometimes you have commissions, sometimes you don't. The same is true in filmmaking. If you are going to grow, stay alive, remain sensitive, and valid, you have to keep working seriously. If your value in life is to be always doing what comes along, you are abandoning your responsibility as an artist.

Q. How do you split up the work on a project?

A. I think John makes the major aesthetic contribution. We both work on storyboard and concept. We both work on soundtrack. In most cases, John is the director, and I'll help in any way that I can. I'll be production organizer and see that the work gets finished on time. The last film that we made, *Cockaboody,* was the most evenly divided. It is conceivable in the future that we might make films apart from each other, but it's been such a struggle up to now to keep that one film a year commitment that this intense kind of corroboration has been fruitful and necessary.

Q. Which are the films that were the one film a year projects?

A. *Adventures* was commissioned by the Guggenheim and financed jointly, but it was a big work of love and beyond. *Tender Game* we started ourselves. *The Hole* had no sponsor. *The Hat* had a sponsor. *Of Stars and Men* was absolutely ours. *Tijuana Brass* was kind of a commercial for the Tijuana Brass. *Urbanissimo* was commissioned by the Central Housing Mortgage of Canada, and it was a serious film on which we worked very hard and loved. *Zuckerkandl*--half and half with Center for

the Study of Democratic Institutions. *Windy Day* was ours with a little bit of help from Paramount. *Harlem Wednesday* we did ourselves. *Eggs* we did ourselves. *Cockaboody* was made in partnership with Yale--a labor of love, again jointly financed.

Q. Do these movies pay off?

A. *Moonbird* is 14 years old, and it just cleared itself this year. The others no.

Q. Do you know of any other artists or film-makers around that have the kind of arrangement you both have?

A. There is a couple in Switzerland whom I don't know personally, just their work.

Q. What do you like about the arrangement? What's special about it?

A. I can only speak for myself. It's given me a lot of freedom and has been gratifying in terms of expression and how I could organize my life. And it's been terrific, being a woman, and being able to have a studio near home. Our kids have all worked here; they can draw, paint and do voice. It's been like an atelier. However, the future is a bit uncertain.

Q. Do you and John do most of the work?

A. It depends on the project. *Windy Day*, for example, I inked every drawing and sent out for the coloring, because the line was so important. *Cockaboody*, the same. We try to keep the staff at half a dozen This work is highly personal and it suffers terrifically if it gets farmed out to strangers.

Q. Where is your camera?

A. We have not had a camera in the studio since *Moonbird.* There were too many interruptions and it interfered with our work. For many years we used a service in California; we are now using one in New York and occasionally in California. The distance is marvelous. We try to get in two or three hours of intense creative work, and we can't do it with constant interruptions.

Q. (Questioning John Hubley) You spent a year doing TV commercials exclusively after leaving UPA?

A. (John Hubley) It was about a year of solid commercials, but during that time I had done a story-board for a feature which we got underway and almost into production before the money fell apart. That was *Finian's Rainbow.* We were going to do it as an animated feature. It was just fantastic--a terrific sound track with dialog and music recorded. We started into production and the damn thing came unglued. The backers just couldn't pull it together.

Q. Do you still have the elements to *Finian's Rainbow?*

A. No, it all reverted. I have some tapes, but nothing else. We recorded Sinatra, Ella Fitzgerald, Louis Armstrong, Oscar Peterson. We had a marvelous track.

Q. Are there any other movies like *Four Poster* where your animation and live action were done together?

A. That's the only one.

Q. What is the philosophy behind your one serious film a year commitment?

A. The philosophy is: if you believe in this media as an art, and you believe yourself to be an artist, and you want to make films as an artist, you have to go ahead and do it; you have to make what you want to make, have control over it, and make it on your terms. The old struggle of art versus commerce and whether the artist can control creativity or be told what to do by the money people is one that we realize every artist is up against. Faith and I decided that we would separate the two functions and never let the necessity of earning a living interfere with the production of one film a year. In other words, make the living doing other things and always keep one film a year where you don't have to worry about economics. (Well, you do worry about the economics, because you're pouring money into it and you can't expect to get it back.) But it's very important to do it, because it feeds your whole creative life. You make discoveries, you make breakthroughs, you have a sense of creative freedom that carries you beyond what a commercial job will. You are on a level that even helps your commercial work because you've grown as an artist. It's very important for an artist to constantly face new challenges.

Q. Do you have any favorite titles among these personal films?

A. They're like children; you really have a feeling for every one of them one way or another.

Q. What are you doing right now?

A. A three minute history of the United States.

Q. How long do you expect it to take for this project to get finished?

A. It really depends on the okays from government or from the BiCentennial Commission. It will take us about four months once we get it approved.

Q. Your other current activities are Electric Company and Sesame Street?

A. Yes, and a film being made in conjunction with a class at Yale. This is a visual translation of some ideas of future world values. International lawyers, sociologists and scholars deliver a series of lectures. From these we must devise a way of visualizing these world concepts in filmic terms. It's tentatively titled *Next*.

Q. How about some of your past big accounts. Are you doing more of it or less of it?

A. Less.

Q. You're in a position now where you don't have to, I suppose?

A. Well, I hope so. Sometimes you sweat a little. There is a lot of television work, educational and industrial work. Commercials pay very well on the surface, but the wear and tear of doing it and the struggle with the complex of the agency plus the client uses up all the money. You don't really make much

money; it's an illusion. It used to be more gratifying when we wrote the commercials. That was more fun, because at least you were carrying out your own conception, but that seldom happens now. The agencies have guys on staff that do the storyboards and get it approved by the client. Then they call in the animator and say, "OK this is what we're making; make it great!" They have a name for you: supplier.

Q. How old are your children?

A. Mark is 21. Ray is 17. The girls are 15 and 13. The girls were just 2 and 4 on the *Cockaboody* tape.

Q. Have you been collecting tapes?

A. We had that one, because we intended to make a film with our two girls after we did *Moonbird.* We had trouble deciding what to do and how much to use. There were other delays, including not finding a theatrical sponsor. We dropped that, and then about two years later, the need to do one was very great so we recorded another tape, and that was *Windy Day.* Just last year, I kept thinking about that early tape; so I said, "Let's just get that out and make it."

Q. And that became the Yale project?

A. Yes, they have a fund up there that aids projects that are faculty inspired; so we got a little help from them.

Q. Do you have any future projects you are going to do, or would you like to do a feature? *Heavy Traffic* and *Fritz the Cat* seem to be doing pretty well.

A. They are both about equally valid, good or bad. I don't happen to like that level of film, but I can't say I was bored. They made a lot of money, and that has changed a lot of conditions. The industry as such has had a prejudice against animated features. They felt Disney was the only animator that could do it. Since the UPA days we've had feature projects we would try to get off the ground. We wanted to do *Gulliver's Travels* and had a whole Thurber package. We optioned the rights to some of Thurber's short stories. After I left they finally made one-- *The Unicorn in the Garden.* It was excellent. But we just couldn't break through the distributors and convince them that a new feature would be commercial. Now there's a climate for it. I'm going to get together a project. Faith isn't terribly interested. She doesn't feel a great need to make a feature. I am, and given the right book, the right subject, I would be interested in making a longer film. I feel a little constricted by shorts. So, I'm going to look for something and try to sell it. We would probably work together on various sequences. Faith's terribly imaginative with writing and ideas, but she's inclined to uncommercial. At least that's been our past experience. I could be wrong.

Q. Where do you get your ideas for visuals?

A. I've never really tried to analyze that. It always comes out of a content need. We know what we want to say, we know what thoughts we're dealing with and what we're trying to put across. We scratch around for an image that plays dramatically (a visual metaphor) and that will develop into a scene. Take *The Hole* premise. It's a scene that's all. A couple digging a hole in the ground get into a conversation. That came out of an observation. We had an office on Riverside Drive and 87th Street on the ground floor corner. We came to work one morning and there was a pheumatic drill right outside the window busting up the sidewalk. The five workmen stayed there for two or three days, and since I couldn't work, I went out there and started talking to these guys. I started watching them, drawing pictures of them, and gradually got more interested as the sense of what they were doing unfolded in how they related to people. I got quite involved with that. About the same time, this distributor Brandon came around and said if you had a film that dealt with the danger of a nuclear accident and with the whole hysteria that is in the air right now (that was around the time of Fail Safe, the Cuban missile crisis), it would really be very successful. They agreed to put up some money to get started. We recorded the sound track and went into the visuals. The visuals were out of this experience with the Con Ed guys.

Q. Can you tell me something about your style? How has it evolved?

A. The graphic attempt, aside from the UPA breakthrough of style from Disney, has always been a tendency toward the modern aesthetic influenced by painters. In the early days it was Picasso, Dufy, Matisse that influenced the drive to a direct childlike flat simplified design rather than a Disney 18th Century watercolor. I also always had a terrific rebellion against the sweet sentimental chipmunks and bunnies idiom of animation, saying, "Why can't these be human caricatures and get the same vitality in animation characters that still drawings have?" *Snow White* especially began to promise that; the dwarfs had a lot of vitality. Then a Russian cartoon showed up on the Disney lot one day brought by Frank Lloyd Wright. It was very modern with flat backgrounds, highly stylized characters, modern music. It was very exciting and had a big influence on me. The Air Force experience was a break that started in that direction. The UPA experience was really a chance to do it, and it paid off. It hit audiences well; it was critically well received. *McBoing* was a huge hit. The word started spreading that there was a new look to animation and Disney was finished! Then we were doing *Finian* and my impulse then, with the help of Faith, was to develop the visual art even further than the UPA films had. The need to breakthrough and to play around with more plasticity led to *Adventures of An* *. We were commissioned by the Guggenheim Museum to do a film for the public that would say there is more than one way to look at things. You can see things abstractly and you can take pleasure in visual experience. without having a lot of rules to follow. We decided to do a film with music and no dialogue, and to deal with abstract characters. We wanted to get a graphic look that was totally unique to animation; that had never been seen before. So we played with the wax-resist technique; drawing with wax and splashing it with watercolor so you produce a resisted texture. We ended up waxing all the drawings and spraying them and double exposing them in. We did the backgrounds the same way. It photographed with a very rich waxy texture, which was a fresh look. That film hit European animators like a bombshell, and pow! it set them on fire. For awhile that little * became a symbol in Europe of the breakthrough for animation. From that point on artists started exploring millions of different graphic techniques. So for our own films after that, it was always the question of finding a slightly different technique. *Tender Game* went to another direction--segmented figures. In *Children of the Sun* we got into oil painting techniques. In the latter years some of our films *(Urbanissimo, Zuckerkandl, Tijuana Brass)* had a tendency to be a little more standard and repetitive in style, partly because they dealt with a content that needed an illustrative form; one couldn't go abstract. It forced us to go back to line again. *The Cruise* went fairly far out in character design. *Windy Day* had its own spacious look to it, and that was the bottom light and washy watercolors. *Cockaboody* is cut-outs--we painted on paper and cut them out. I'm hoping to get back to ideas that will enable us to make some more exploration in graphics . . . new ways of animation, ways of breaking a figure down and moving it. If you look at the recent Picasso work, you'll see how he breaks faces up and makes huge inner shapes within the faces. I can see animating those kind of shapes inside of a form and let it gradually reveal a character. That's a direction I want to explore, as well as the surrealist design of character. Why can't a character be made of a lot of crazy odds and ends if he talks and moves around and is interesting?

Q. Like the god image in *Eggs?*

A. Yes. We tried to make it as cosmic as possible and have aspects of all god-like imagery. We had a lot of trouble with that voice. People said that they couldn't understand it, which was absolutely deliberate. That was done on a frequency modulator which actually takes the voice and reproduces it in thirds and fifths, so that when it was talking it sounded like a chord.

Q. In developing that figure of god, did you both work on that together?

A. Absolutely. I drew the concept of the god figure image originally, but the first drawings I did were sort of the Michelangelo god. It was Faith's idea to do a god with three faces and all kinds of mouths and it made a terrific difference.

Q. In this development of animation that you have been a part of where does someone like Norman McLaren fit? Was he working along the same lines at the same time?

A. Not along the same lines, because he was interested in, and has always been interested in, a very personal direction. He conceives, draws, makes practically every element. He's explored media methods to a much greater extent. He was a great inspiration to me at a certain point in my career. It was about 1950. He came out to visit us at UPA, and he brought a new print called *Begone Dull Care* and showed it to us. It knocked us all over. it was so fantastic. It was direct on film, and it had that marvelous Oscar Peterson track. It was very stimulating to me to see that a film artist can take the path of making his own film and expressing himself. Nobody's done it better than Norman; he's been the most pure and the most devoted all his life. His mentor was Len Lye, who had the same principles as Norman; he imbued Norman with them. That is to say: that a film artist can make a film all on his own and do every bit of it if he wants to. If your means are limited, you work with limited means. That's how he got to the idea of drawing directly on film or creating his own soundtracks. He has produced a synthetic scale, which he can write scores with. Really marvelously inventive. He was the first guy to get into computer animation. It didn't interest him very much, but he did do some.

Q. What about computer animation? What do you think of it?

A. The commercial part of it is fad. Underlying that is the use of computers for animating. I think it has terrific promise, and fantastic things will happen and it will all merge together some way eventually in some form of art. I don't know who is going to do it and what it's going to be. Right now it is still sort of mathematical exercises. The guys that do try to make films wind up doing what you would do if you were drawing it, except it has the indelible stamp of a computer doing it. A computer is another tool and good filmmakers using it with taste and judgement will turn out some terrific stuff. I haven't seen anything that has flipped me as a film, but I've seen some fantastic exercises and marvelous effects--mathematics in motion. You could probably do some interesting things mixing the media, and there is a great opportunity for three dimensional effect.

Q. What about the Whitneys?

A. They are probably the most advanced. I have only seen two or three of them. They are very formal, but very good. I don't know anybody who is doing any better. But I always feel the limitations. In the one done with circles, there is such a restricted feeling. You never feel as if you could get out of that one little area of space. You want to move, shift the camera around, zoom, break out. The Whitneys are probably doing these things, I don't know. I could see traveling on an infinity zoom which would be fantastic!

JOHN HUBLEY

Training:
Art Center School, Los Angeles
Art Students League, New York

Exhibitions:
Los Angeles Museum
Pasadena Art Museum
Pomona College
Long Beach Municipal Auditorium
The McKenzie Gallery, New York
The Forum Gallery, New York
Princeton Gallery

Visiting Lecturer, Yale School of Graphic Arts

FAITH HUBLEY

Training:
Art Students League, New York
New School, New York

Exhibitions:
Cooperstown Gallery, New York
17th Annual Knickerbocker Artists, New York
Ware Gallery Ardentown, Delaware
New Jersey City Museum
Springfield Museum, Massachusetts
National Academy of Design, New York
The McKenzie Gallery, Los Angeles
The Forum Gallery, New York

Visiting Lecturer, Yale School of Graphic Arts

JOHN HUBLEY – FAITH HUBLEY

FILMOGRAPHY

ADVENTURES OF AN * (1957)

Awards: Venice Film Festival, Diploma Speciale, 1957
Montevideo Film Festival, Grand Prize, 1958
Melbourne Film Festival, Best Animated Film, 1958

Distributor: Contemporary/McGraw-Hill Films, Inc.

HARLEM WEDNESDAY (1957)

Awards: Venice Film Festival, Honorable Mention, 1958
Montevideo Film Festival, Honorable Mention, 1958

Distributor: Contemporary/McGraw-Hill Films, Inc.

TENDER GAME (1958)

Awards: Venice Film Festival, Grand Prize, 1958
Montevideo Film Festival, Grand Prize, 1959

Distributor: Contemporary/McGraw-Hill Films, Inc.

MOONBIRD (1959)

Awards: Academy Award, 1959
Venice Film Festival, Grand Prize, 1959
International Film Critics, Grand Prize, Annecy, 1960
Oberhausen Film Festival, First Prize, Short Film, 1960

Distributor: Radim Films

CHILDREN OF THE SUN (1960)

Awards: Venice Documentary Festival, First Prize, 1961
Cannes Film Festival, Best Children's Films, 1961

Distributor: Association-Sterling Films

OF STARS AND MEN (1962)

Awards: Annecy Film Festival, Prix Special du Jury, 1962
San Francisco International Film Festival,
Best Documentary Feature, Golden Gate Award, 1961

Distributor: Time/Life Films, Inc.

THE HOLE (1963)

Awards: Academy Award, 1963
Venice Film Festival, Grand Prize, 1963
Annecy Film Festival, Special Jury Prize, 1963
American Film Festival, Blue Ribbon Award, 1963

Distributor: Contemporary/McGraw-Hill Films, Inc.

THE HAT -(1964)

Awards: Venice Film Festival, Special Jury Prize, 1964
Tours Film Festival, Prix Special du Jury, 1964
Oberhausen Film Festival, Honorable Mention, 1965

Distributor: Contemporary/McGraw-Hill Films, Inc.

URBANISSIMO (1966)

Awards: CINE Golden Eagle, 1970

Distributor: Contemporary/McGraw-Hill Films, Inc.

TIJUANA BRASS-DOUBLE FEATURE (1966)

Awards: Academy Award, 1966
CINE Golden Eagle, 1967

Distributor: Paramount Pictures

WINDY DAY (1967)

Awards: Venice Film Festival, Golden Lion, 1968

Distributor: Radim Films, Inc.

THE CRUISE (1967)

Distributor: Eccentric Circle

ZUCKERKANDL (1968)

Distributor: Grove Press

OF MEN AND DEMONS (1970)

Awards: Annecy Film Festival, Prix Special du Jury, 1962
San Francisco International Film Festival, Best Documentary Feature, Golden Gate Award, 1961

Distributor: Modern Talking Pictures, Inc.

EGGS (1970)

Awards: Chicago International Film Festival, Victor Hugo Award, 1971
CINE Golden Eagle, 1971
American Film Festival, Red Ribbon Award, 1971

Distributor: Radim Films, Inc.

DIG (1972)

Awards: CINE Golden Eagle, 1972

Distributor: Radim Films, Inc.

UPKEEP (1973)

Distributor: Modern Talking Pictures, Inc.

COCKABOODY (1973)

Awards: 2nd New York Animation Film Festival, 1974

Distributor: Pyramid Films

VOYAGE TO NEXT (1974)

ELECTRIC COMPANY SEGMENTS

Produced for Children's Television Workshop

SESAME STREET SEGMENTS

Produced for Children's Television Workshop

Mid America Film Center KCAI